

June 21, 2011

House Committee on Natural Resources, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation

I am compiling a list (requested by Sandra Batie, chair of the Equine Trails Subcommittee) of equestrian campgrounds and trails in Michigan for the Pure Michigan Ad campaign. Comparing it to other states, I am saddened.

I have provided you with copies of a nationally acclaimed equestrian publication. I hope that each of you will take one to look through while you are on summer break. This is just one of several magazines that has articles about equestrian trail riding. Flipping through the magazine you'll see dozens of ads for camping and riding in other states.

There may have once been a short mention of Michigan's shore-to-shore riding-hiking trail in one of these magazines. But because there are no "nice" equestrian campgrounds in Michigan – so we don't get any press.

What's a nice equestrian campground?

- ✦ Electric hookups
- ✦ Potable water
- ✦ Shower facilities
- ✦ Grey & black water RV dump stations
- ✦ Horse pens
- ✦ Durable surface parking spots
- ✦ Wide roadways for the 20' and longer trailers
- ✦ SHADE
- ✦ Access to 35 or more miles of horse trails over a variety of terrain.

Why aren't there "nice" campgrounds?

- ✦ State & local agencies that have too much control over public land use and access.
- ✦ State & local agencies that take too long to approve common sense situations.
- ✦ State agencies that have too much authority.
- ✦ State agencies that close their own equestrian trails, pave them, or turn over equestrian trails to other users.
- ✦ State agencies that have locked gates to camping sites and require 60 days notice for reservations!

Can you imagine? How can Michigan expect to make money with that kind of business model?

These magazines have articles that describe great places to ride:

- ✦ Wisconsin, Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Tennessee, Missouri, Kentucky, South & North Dakota,
- ✦ New York State – including trail riding in the 5 boroughs of New York City.
- ✦ Southern, western, northeastern & mid-Atlantic states.
- ✦ Trail riding spots where Michigan equestrians go – taking their tourism dollars with them.

These states understand – a full campground is a money-maker not just to the campground, but surrounding businesses, including state sales tax revenues.

Our tourism money is leaving the state because we have no "nice" campgrounds and state agencies continually threaten to close what equestrian trails we have or turn them over to other users.

When a private citizen in those states builds campground – whether it's for horses, sleds, or ATVs, they invest their OWN money. In order to bring in their customers, they have to have a "really good thing". This means they have to work hard and invest in, AND PROTECT, their land. There should be NO REASON that access from private property to state trail systems should be one of the most difficult part of their investment. But it frequently is.

An example of too much bureaucracy: Let's consider a rustic shower that might get used 3 or 4 months a year for a campground and keep in mind the sandy type of soil that is prevalent in Michigan. We have vault toilets (outhouses) at these remote sites; we have wells, but can't have showers. City folks can wash their cars, dogs, barbecue grills, and who knows what else, and it all washes down storm drains to the great lakes – but we can't wash our bodies in remote, sandy places that are no where near a lake or river.

Campground proprietors must be ever vigilant that public land access is not suddenly closed without notice as it has been, in the past! Ask private property owners near Holly Recreation Area, in Lapeer County, and adjacent to Pigeon River Country State Forest.

Earlier this year, this committee provided \$30 Million to the Pure Michigan ad campaign in order to increase tourism in the state of Michigan.

**Tourism won't increase unless other actions in the state are changed FIRST.
If you want to change the results – you have to change what you are doing.**

State agencies - in what I think is an effort to create their very own job security – take years to approve simple, common-sense rule changes. These same agencies have created a complex web of rules and licensing mandates that only the very rich and persistent private citizen or enterprise can stay focused on to completion. Even employees of these state agencies will tell you that they barely understand what the requirements are.

The extreme limitations foisted upon business through DEQ, DNR, and health service permits; the ridiculous amount of red tape; and the ungodly number of years taken by state agencies in planning and review processes are what are killing the state's tourism industry.

As members of the Natural Resource, Tourism, and Outdoor Recreation committee I urge you to do your utmost to ensure that **the intent of the Right to Ride** legislation, passed last year, **moves forward! That means putting pressure on the state agencies to loosen the stranglehold they have on tourism activities!**

We are losing yet another year of equestrian tourism & revenue in Michigan. Businesses in Vanderbilt, near Pigeon River have closed or nearly so. Property values have declined immensely with no snowmobiling or horseback riding allowed. You must do what is necessary to open public land to those who want to recreate on it. This includes not only passing HB 4684, but going beyond that to influence state agencies.

Please look through these magazines during your summer break.

- ✦ Look at the ads for horse trailers with living quarters. People travel from campground to campground, and state to state, with their horses! They expect sites with running water, electric, manure bunkers, and dump stations.
- ✦ Equestrian tourists spend money at grocery stores, restaurants, laundromats. They buy local hay, firewood, & camp supplies.
- ✦ The majority of Michigan recreational riders have no living quarters trailers and must use primitive campsites. No showers or running water. No electric. No flush toilets.
- ✦ Think carefully about how Michigan could prosper as a destination state for horseback riding when southern states have higher temperatures!
- ✦ Think about viewing wildlife from the back of a horse or even using a horse to travel to remote places to hunt, trap, and fish!
- ✦ In Michigan there are 155,000 horses; 80,000 recreational riders; it's an \$8 Billion Industry with \$1 Billion in annual revenues. Consider what Michigan is missing from recreational riders in surrounding states.

We need HB 4684 – but more importantly, we need this state to use COMMON SENSE to encourage seasonal tourism! You, as our elected officials, need to make the changes.

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